

Vote Jesus the Truth!

Session 1: "My Kingdom Is Not of This World"

John 18:33-40, 19:4-12

One of the challenges that Christians face today is in understanding our participation in the political affairs and life of our country. For many years, the subject of politics never came up in church; it was as if people believed that the "separation of church and state" meant that churches (and, by extension, Christians) weren't allowed to weigh in on matters that were considered to be "political." All of that began to change in the lead-up to the 1980 presidential election, with the emergence of religio-political organizations like "Moral Majority." Over the past 40 years, churches have become more and more involved and engaged in political discussions – with different churches on opposite sides of the political "aisle."

There is nothing wrong with Christians being engaged and involved in the political life of our communities and our nation. There is nothing wrong with churches and pastors discussing the ways that Scripture ought to influence our position on certain issues. But in the midst of all of the political discourse, we must never lose sight of the fact that the Kingdom which claims our ultimate allegiance is the heavenly Kingdom of God, not any of the kingdoms of this earth.

We see one of the clearest statements of this fact in Jesus' discussions with Pontius Pilate during Jesus' trial in chapters 18 and 19 of John's Gospel:

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me.

What is it you have done?"

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

"What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

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(19:4) Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!"

But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." (John 18:32-40; 19:4-12, NIV).

1. **What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "My kingdom is not of this world"?**
2. **Reflect on the second part of Jesus' statement: "*If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders.*" In what ways are we "fighting" for his Kingdom today? At what point would our "fighting" cross the line into the kind of "fighting" that Jesus disclaims?**
3. **Pilate's question to Jesus - "*What is truth?*" – is very familiar to anyone who has read this passage of Scripture. How would you answer that question? How does our world answer the question, "What is truth?"**
4. **Jesus said, "*Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*" What other passages can you think of where Jesus explains what it means for us to "listen to" him? What does this statement tell us about what it means to be followers of Jesus?**
5. **Reflect on the contrast between earthly power and Kingdom power. Pilate claimed that he had power either to release Jesus or to crucify him, while Jesus said that Pilate's "power" was given to him from above. How do we understand the relationship between governments and their power and the Kingdom of God?**
6. **Jesus said, "*Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.*" Who do you think he meant? Notice that Jesus says that the one who handed him over to Pilate was guilty of "a greater sin" – which implies that Pilate, too, was guilty of sin for crucifying Jesus. How would you explain this passage to someone who believes that Pilate was an "innocent bystander"?**
7. **After reading and reflecting on this passage, how would you explain "the Kingdom of God" to someone who is not a believer?**